



Hen Harrier Action: June 2023 Newsletter

By now, many Hen Harrier pairs will have young in the nest, and all over our uplands, males will be bringing in prey for the female, transferring the food items in spectacular mid-air food passes. This ingenious practice means that the more conspicuous ghost-grey male can avoid giving away the nest location and attracting predators.

Let's hope that Hen Harriers will enjoy a productive nesting season in 2023.



Hen Harrier Action News

Illegal killing associated with gamebird management is a major cause of death in Hen Harriers

A new study, published in the renowned scientific journal **Biological Conservation** and co-authored by HHA's chair Cathleen Thomas, shows that illegal killing is the main cause of death for older Hen Harriers, and that illegal killing was highest in areas managed for grouse shooting.

The report concludes that yearly survival rates of Hen Harriers are 'unusually low' and highlights the significant role that persecution plays in limiting Hen Harrier populations in the UK.

Using data from the biggest GPS tracking study of Hen Harriers in the world, the report concludes that tracked individuals typically lived an average of just 121 days after fledging.

Cathleen Thomas commented, *"It makes grim reading, but this report*

adds significant new data to the overwhelming body of evidence demonstrating that persecution linked with grouse moors has a devastating impact on Hen Harrier populations and must be stopped”.

You can read the whole study [here](#).

Author Gill Lewis launches 2023 Young Wild Writers Competition

This year’s **Young Wild Writers** competition is now open to all young people aged 6 to 16 years, and you can find the full details of [how to enter here](#), but hurry, as the deadline for entries is midnight on the 10th of July.

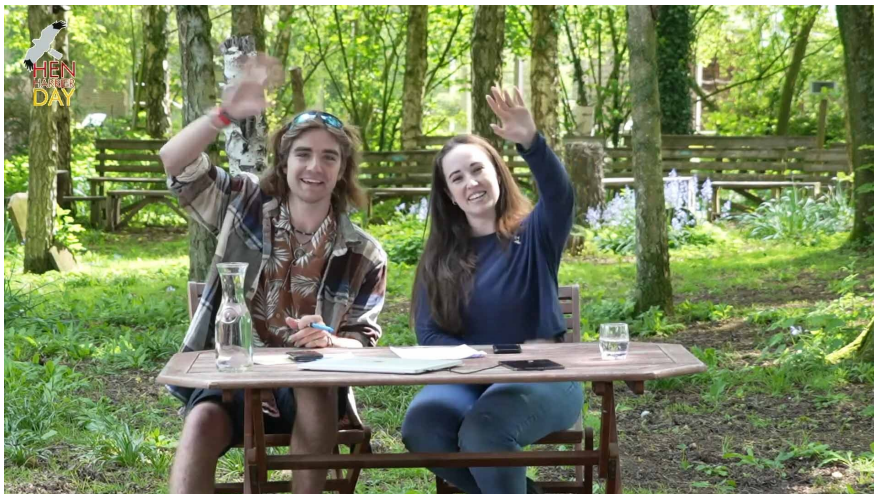
Launched live on **Skydancer Day** by children’s author **Gill Lewis**, the theme for this year is Animal Survival, and entrants are asked to submit stories, poems, articles, prose, or letters of up to 500 words. Prizes include book tokens, RSPB Puffin binoculars plus an online author visit by Gill Lewis to the overall winner’s school or class.

For teachers, there is a downloadable version of Gill Lewis’s poster on the website that can be used for school notice boards.

Skydancer Day: It’s a Wrap

Over 700 people tuned in for Skydancer Day live on YouTube on Sunday 7th May, and many more have watched the recorded version since. The theme for this year was ‘Survival’ and if you didn’t get a chance to watch it live, you can view the whole broadcast on our [YouTube channel](#).

And there’s a synopsis of all the [Skydancer Day highlights](#), along with feedback from producer Paul and co-host Indy, just published on our website.



It's a Wrap: Skydancer Day Feedback from Indy and Paul

We asked co-host Indy and producer Paul for their feedback on the event:

Indy said, *"There was some great content and we covered a wide range of upland issues. I thought it went even better than last year, from my perspective. It was my second year of presenting, and I felt more comfortable and confident."*

The Hawk Conservancy Trust was a great setting, and everyone was supportive. We were surrounded by birds of prey, which was appropriate. I watched a flying display after the broadcast - there were hawks, owls and even wild Red Kites flying around - it was very cool."

Asked what drives him to put so much time into conservation issues, Indy commented, *"I've only got 9 days left of college before I finish. My course is Conservation Management and I've really loved that - I have learned so much."*

I grew up in a house in the middle of Sherwood Forest surrounded by nature and very aware of the changing seasons, watching different birds arrive and leave. Older birders tell me about species that have disappeared, and I want to do my bit to change that."

And Indy's message for young people?

"I'd recommend volunteering. It changed everything for me. The people I've met and the different landscapes I've worked in - I've learned more by volunteering than I ever could on any university or college course. I've been volunteering since I was 14, doing guided walks and practical conservation work."

The man behind the camera on the day, wildlife and documentary film maker Paul Samuels, began preparations for the live broadcast months in advance.

According to Paul, *"preparation for next Skydancer Day begins almost as soon as the last one has finished, but I started to prepare seriously in January. I visited The Hawk Conservancy Trust several times beforehand to familiarise myself with the venue."*

And I travelled to Scotland to film Ian Thompson and the Tarras Valley team, to Wales to interview and film Keith Offord, and to RSPB HQ in Bedfordshire for interviews with Investigations Officer Jenny Shelton, and Senior Conservation Scientist Dr Simon Wotton."

Pulling together all the items that go into the live broadcast takes months of preparation and a lot of travel, and Paul packs all his kit into his trusty Fiat 500.

"It has more space than you think with the back seats down – the secret is in the packing!" he claims.

Paul enjoyed filming at the Hawk Conservancy Trust. *"It was a terrific venue. We were filming in what's called the Woodland Area, and we had to time our broadcast in between flying displays and 'raptor experiences'. We were lucky with the weather too."*

What are Paul's ambitions for future Skydancer Days?

"I hope that we can extend the reach of Skydancer Day and widen the audience by covering a broader range of issues next year. I'd like to extend our remit to cover re-wilding as a topic. I think it has a lot in common with our own objectives as a charity – restoring biodiversity in the uplands – and it's an important topic for conservationists."

News roundup

Hen Harrier persecution featured on Springwatch this week

Two investigative films featured on Week Two of Springwatch. In Episode 5, BBC correspondent and President of the BTO Frank Gardner, heads to Cumbria to investigate Hen Harrier persecution.

In Episode 6, Frank is in Norfolk interviewing Mark Thomas, head of the RSPB Investigations Team, who reveals some shocking facts on raptor persecution and the efforts to prosecute those responsible.

You can watch these and other episodes on the [BBC iPlayer](#).

The RSPB Hen Harrier Survey 2023 needs your sightings

The 2023 survey is well under way, with dozens of fieldworkers and volunteers logging sightings and nests. The RSPB is asking for any sightings to be reported, making a note of the date, time, and location. Sightings can be reported to henharriers@rspb.org.uk or you can call on **0845 460 1021**.

Channel 4 News features the new report on illegal killing

The new scientific study published in **Biological Conservation**, co-authored by HHA's Cathleen Thomas, featured in an excellent 4-minute slot on the 10th of May.

Chief Correspondent Alex Thomson reported from Geltsdale in the North Pennines, noting that *"The report adds to already overwhelming data from Government, Police, conservation bodies and video footage, that illegally killing Hen Harriers because they sometimes kill Red Grouse remains the key reason for their rarity, despite 70 years of legal protection."*

You can [watch the report here](#).

Get involved

If you're thinking of holding an event for Hen Harrier Day in early August, whether large or small, please get in touch by emailing info@henharrierday.uk

We can help you organise and promote the event, and there is plenty of advice on our [website](#).

Support us: Support Hen Harriers

Many thanks to all the supporters who have once again been so generous in supporting our work. As ever, the encouragement it gives us is at least equal to the monetary value of the donation. So we always welcome donations, especially new regular contributions. To make a donation, click [here](#), (if eligible please click the Gift Aid box too).

Hen Harrier Action

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